

## **Learning about Protecting Your Collections**

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Last week, the National Task Force on Emergency Response became the **Heritage Emergency National Task Force**. We made the change for two reasons: the new name clarifies our mission to safeguard cultural heritage, and it more accurately reflects our goals, which have been broadened to include preparedness and mitigation as well as response.

In practice, however, we're still the same Task Force. We take what FEMA describes as an "all hazards" approach. No matter what kind of disaster, there will be common needs to address and similar measures to take. Task Force members also have always understood that while rescuing cultural and historic resources is an important role, we need to play that role at the right time. People – their safety, health, and shelter – come first.

The Heritage Emergency National Task Force is an informal partnership of 34 Federal agencies and national service organizations concerned with protecting the nation's heritage. It was founded in 1995 with help from the Getty Conservation Institute, and it is now sponsored by the nonprofit Heritage Preservation and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Our current efforts are in four areas:

- Facilitating the exchange of information and cooperation among government agencies and national preservation organizations after major disasters;
- Bringing the disaster management needs of collecting institutions and historic sites to the attention of policy-makers;
- Providing authoritative, concise information and resources on disaster preparedness, mitigation, and response to cultural institutions nationwide; and
- Making that good information accessible to the public.

### **Coordination and Information Exchange**

Since the attacks of September 11, 2001, Task Force members have met twice in Washington, and we have served as an informal clearinghouse for information on condition, needs, and potential assistance. We continue to exchange information with other organizations coordinating response and undertaking initiatives in documentation and interpretation – Library of Congress, Archivists Roundtable in New York, Museum of the City of New York, and others. Through the Task Force network, we were able to quickly alert FEMA to a cache of artifacts from the African Burial Ground beneath the rubble of WTC Building 6. The timely cooperation among our members resulted in the rescue of some 200 boxes of artifacts.

Through our Task Force partners, we also receive and pass along significant news. For example, FEMA has just launched a new Historic Preservation Program Web site with links to general

cultural heritage resources, as well as to sites with news and information on response to the terrorist attacks.

We have also just learned that President Bush signed into law an appropriations bill adding \$320 million to SBA's loan capacity to aid victims of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. In addition to expanding the maximum loan amount, the initiative makes small, nonprofit institutions located in the declared disaster areas eligible for Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDLs). More information can be found at [www.sba.gov/news](http://www.sba.gov/news). Release Number 02-04.

### **Policy Studies**

With funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the Bay Foundation, Heritage Preservation is conducting a survey of lower Manhattan cultural institutions. In addition to surveying collecting institutions, the initiative will also look at outdoor sculpture, and if time permits, significant collections in private hands. We are evaluating damage and loss resulting from September 11<sup>th</sup>, as well as looking at disaster management and preservation issues. We hope to learn how preparedness and response strategies may change in reaction to the attacks. The report will be issued in the spring of 2002.

We have sent out 120 surveys, and about one-third of them have been returned as of January 22, 2002. Some preliminary results:

- Half of the institutions responding had no emergency response plan
- Almost all suffered communications problems
- Almost 70 % said their staffs could benefit from disaster response training, and their emergency plans – if they had them – would need to be revised.

[For the completed report, see <http://www.heritagepreservation.org/NEWS/Cataclysm.htm>.]

### **Information for Cultural Institutions**

The Task Force has three major publications: (1) *Flood/Hurricane Information Packets*, which we distribute after declared disasters; (2) *Resources for Recovery: Federal Disaster Aid for Cultural Institutions*; and of course, (3) the *Emergency Response & Salvage Wheel*. When the Wheel was first released in 1997, funding from NEH and the St. Paul Companies enabled us to distribute more than 46,000 free copies. Since then, more than 23,000 copies of the Wheel have been sold. This innovative tool is in use in more than 40 countries around the world. It has been translated into Dutch, French, and Chinese. I'm happy to announce that we have now received sufficient funding to produce a Spanish-language Wheel, which will be released this spring.

We also have many links to disaster management information resources on the Task Force Web site at <http://www.heritageemergency.org>.

### **Information for the Public**

We are very proud of our efforts in this area. We know that museums and libraries at the center of their communities can be a source of comfort and strength for citizens in the wake of disasters. We want them to be a source of sound information, too, about salvaging family photos and other treasures. As you are aware, there is no shortage of well-intentioned but often bad advice about ironing family Bibles and drying your color snapshots in the sun. Articles written with

professional conservators, including the famous “Ten Tips,” are available on FEMA’s Web site at <http://www.fema.gov/hazards/floods/coping.shtm>.

### **Future Plans**

We have developed a proposal called “Alliance for Response,” to bring first responders and preservation professionals together in communities. We hope this will serve to strengthen the disaster response skills of museum and library professionals, as well as raise awareness of the importance of protecting cultural resources.

Certainly the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> reminded us that our national treasures – monuments, documents, artifacts, art, and historic sites – are vulnerable to threats of all kinds. But the tools to help us address risks and safeguard collections are growing in quantity and quality. We have good information resources for planning and response, increasing opportunities for training, and a renewed impetus to build networks. What we need is leadership and financial resources. Government agencies, national associations, and foundations all share the responsibility to help protect our nation’s cultural heritage.